



**Indiana Association
of Soil and Water
Conservation
Districts**

**Indiana Department
of Environmental
Management**

**Indiana Department
of Natural Resources**

**Indiana State
Department of
Agriculture –
Division of Soil**

**Purdue Cooperative
Extension Service**

**State Soil
Conservation Board**

**USDA – Farm Service
Agency**

**USDA – Natural
Resources
Conservation Service**

August 25, 2020

To: Indiana Conservation Partnership

Re: COVID-19 Pandemic and Recommendations for Current Operating Procedures

When Indiana began to deal with the spread of the coronavirus in mid-March, the ICP partners began to gather and share guidance as it was provided by the federal and state government, as well as specific partners. At that time, we could not predict the lasting impact the virus has had on our day-to-day business and lives over the past several months. We understand the fear of the virus and its impact, and the frustration at the ever-changing recommendations from all levels of society. It has become clear to us that as we all get back to work, ICP leadership can help with some procedural recommendations for daily business and events.

We should follow the current legal requirements at each level of government, beginning with federal, then state, and then county requirements. Legal direction has primarily come from the state level with Governor Holcomb's re-opening roadmap entitled "Back on Track Indiana." Indiana's current stage and requirements can be found on the Back on Track website (see attached resources). State level requirements may be coordinating with local efforts and may defer to local control. Local health departments are coordinating approval of event plans for large events over the current size cap and may require plans for all events on a county-by-county basis. It is a good practice to coordinate with your local health officials for any sized event to make sure you are following the recommended procedures to safeguard the health of your attendees.

As we all know, the protection and conservation of Hoosier natural resources must continue during this pandemic time. How do we balance health, safety, protection and business as we move forward now? We recommend you follow federal and state guidelines for required meetings. As the State Soil Conservation Board (SSCB) has demonstrated in their virtual meetings, there is flexibility for districts to hold meetings in "new" ways in order to continue district work. Safety precautions can be observed while also continuing the work of the district. ISDA District Support Specialist (DSS) can advise districts and partners on current state meeting guidelines.

If meeting in-person is not attainable due to circumstances, there are ways to meet virtually online or through free conference call lines. Also, IASWCD, in conjunction with the Conservation Cropping Systems Initiative (CCSI), has invested in a Zoom subscription that is available for districts. Please contact CCSI staff for use of this option.

Regarding in-person meetings, it is essential to follow health guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the Indiana State Department

of Health (ISDH) and your local health departments. Both the CDC and ISDH highly recommend wearing masks for in-person interactions, social distancing of at least 6 feet between people; and as possible, avoid shared contact of surfaces like utensils and supplies. While planning a meeting of any size, the practice of avoidance is not only for the safety of individual attendees, but for the protection of anyone else they may come in contact with, including our local customers, other partners, and our families. The CCSI program has put together a guideline for in-person field days that is helpful for thinking through the planning of meetings, and it is attached to this letter.

As a normal practice, many of us share working spaces. When we work in shared spaces, it is necessary that we follow the safety practices and protocols put in place by our partners. In most instances, we are very fortunate to have the privilege to share partner supplies, equipment and office space, and we should respect and follow the safety requirements that have put into place to safeguard these spaces.

USDA is using a phased, data-driven approach to re-open USDA Service Centers for in-person appointments. Service Centers that are open for appointments will pre-screen visitors based on health concerns or recent travel and visitors must adhere to social distancing guidelines. Visitors are also required to wear a face covering during their appointment. The specific information regarding USDA office phases can be found in the video link on the attachment, as well as current information on the status of USDA Service Centers.

Above all, we want to you to carry on the great work you do in a productive, though safe and healthy, manner. These trying times are difficult, but they are revealing our natural ability to innovate. If there is any way you are struggling, please let us know so we can do our best to support your work. Thanks for all you do on behalf of conservation!

Sincerely,
ICP Leadership